



# **Submission: Storm Recovery and Resilience Consultation**

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Business North Harbour Incorporated

Kevin O'Leary – General Manager  
PO Box 303 126  
North Harbour 0751  
Phone 09 968 2222 or 0274 799 563

Email: [kevin@businessnh.org.nz](mailto:kevin@businessnh.org.nz)

Local Board Representation: Upper Harbour Local Board

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Auckland Council  
Attention: Storm Recovery  
Freepost Authority 190153  
Private Bag 92300, Victoria Street West  
Auckland 1142

E-mail: [stormrecoveryconsultation@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:stormrecoveryconsultation@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz).

## **Submission to Storm Recovery and Resilience Consultation**

### **Introduction**

Business North Harbour (BNH) representing the North Harbour Business Improvement District welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on the Storm Recovery and Resilience Consultation.

BNH is a significant commercial and industrial Business Improvement District (BID), representing over 4,500 commercial property owners and businesses within the North Harbour area. Collectively they employ over 37,000 Auckland residents and ratepayers. The organisation is located within the Upper Harbour Local Board area, which remains one of the fastest growing areas in the country, in both absolute and percentage population terms, which brings both challenges and opportunities to the North Harbour business district.

BNH represents and works with a wide range of businesses comprising of a mix of sole traders, Small Medium Enterprises (SME), through to multi-national organisations, representing sectors such as ICT, business services, specialist manufacturing, light – medium warehousing, logistics, retail and hospitality. In addition, we have key educational institutions within or on our boundary, including Massey University Albany and AUT Millennium, along with a variety of primary and secondary schools including Rangitoto College, the largest secondary school in New Zealand.

### **Background**

In early 2023, the Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland region experienced a series of extreme weather events, with record-breaking rainfall, floods, landslides and high winds. Tragically, six people lost their lives. Thousands of people have been affected, and homes, businesses, and communities have suffered long-term impacts. Auckland Council is committed to supporting communities to recover and prepare for the future.

To address these events, Auckland Council formed the Recovery Office and created an interim recovery plan.

Auckland Council are now developing the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Plan and a series of stormwater improvements called 'Making Space for Water' to focus on the longer-term recovery. Council is asking for feedback to help develop the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Plan and refine the 'Making Space for Water' initiatives.

The BNH response is delivered from a business community perspective and relates to commercial premises, the commercial property owners and the businesses that operate from within these commercial buildings, it is not related to individual households. Our feedback is provided in summary and then answers Council's specific feedback questions which are:

1. How were you and your local community affected by the extreme weather events in early 2023?
2. Was your home flooded or damaged during the extreme weather events in early 2023?
3. In the months following the storms, what has helped you and your community to get through?
4. What would help you and your community feel like you had 'recovered' from these extreme weather events?

5. How can Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland be more prepared for events like this in the future?
6. There are nine possible initiatives outlined in Making Space For Water. Our initial budget suggests it will cost \$1.65 billion to deliver them all and will require additional rates from Aucklanders. Do you have any comments on the initiatives?
7. Are there any other activities that you think are important to manage flooding that haven't been included in Making Space For Water?

### **BNH Feedback Summary:**

One of BNH's objectives is to provide the most efficient, effective and amenable locations for business and investment within Auckland, making it the location of choice for business and property owners. If this is to be achieved, current and potential business and property owners need to be assured as far as is practicable, that locating into the North Harbour BID will ensure that their business or property will not be affected by flooding due to extreme weather events in the future. Sadly, this is not the case at the moment and although our BID was not extensively affected by the storms earlier in the year, some member businesses were badly affected. Since the floods, we have been able to identify some areas which flooded at the time and which have indeed been prone to flooding in the past.

BNH agrees with Council's observation that our region will continue to face an increase in weather-related events in the future and welcomes the fact that Council is being pro-active in its attempts to ensure that the overall response to these future events will be far more effective than was the case in early 2023. Then, by its own admission, Council was both ill-prepared to deal with these events and was unable to offer adequate advice and support to those being affected, until in many cases it was far too late.

We believe that to enable people to make fully informed decisions in future regarding the location of their business premises and homes, they need to better understand, albeit in simple terms, the effects of climate change on storm intensity and what causes surface or flash flooding. BNH would recommend that the information contained on pages 2 and 5 of the Consultation Document form the basis of a simple but effective education initiative, which should be made available to everyone, not just to those individuals or businesses that have taken the time to engage in this consultation. This type of initiative will also support Making Space For Water objective 3, which is to Raise People's Awareness Of Flood Risks.

Given the scale of this project, BNH welcomes the collaborative approach Council is taking to the repair and rebuild of the region which includes a number of key partners such as central government and iwi. We believe that this will produce much better outcomes than the somewhat siloed approach that Council has historically taken across many projects in the past, with one of the expected major benefits being the opportunity to receive financial contributions towards the overall costs of the various projects through some of these key stakeholder relationships.

BNH supports the implementation of the interim recovery plan with the Economic Recovery strand being of most importance to our members.

BNH agrees that in the Making Space For Water programme there needs to be improvement in stormwater management, but we would note that these improvements need to be significant and implemented as soon as possible. Supporting communities, households and businesses to be ready for future storm events can only be achieved if these stormwater management improvements are in place and are fully operational.

We welcome the synergies between the Making Space For Water objectives and the proposals in the Auckland's Future Development Strategy (AFDS) relating to reducing flood risks in known flood areas and avoiding creating new flood risks by not allowing new development in at risk areas. This demonstrates a coordinated approach to addressing these issues which must be maintained to support positive outcomes in both initiatives.

BNH would make the following observations regarding the Making Space For Water initiatives:

- Increased maintenance of the stormwater management network is imperative as the inability of the network to deal with the recent events was exacerbated by the reduction in the maintenance programme in recent years. We believe that increasing the maintenance programme is a relatively simple lever to pull and would suggest that the initiative would benefit from the support of an education programme across the region outlining the risks of dumping debris into the network, with offenders being liable to face hefty fines.
- The gathering of data to improve flood intelligence is important in helping to respond to storm events as they happen and in assessing future risks in existing areas and in new areas of development as noted in the AFDS.
- Community-led initiatives to manage local stormwater and waterways must not be used by Council in such a way as to relinquish their own responsibility. Whilst many communities will be prepared to volunteer some time and effort into helping to keep themselves safe, this goodwill can only go so far and Council must be seen to be supporting each community-led initiative with adequate resources to enable the volunteers to achieve their objectives.
- Given the extent of streams in the region (15,000 kms) the rehabilitation of the high-risk streams to help move flood waters safely away from people and property is important.
- The differing needs in flood risk management of our rural communities needs to be assessed and addressed with those communities, both existing and those newly proposed for development.
- Culvert and bridge upgrades are required to allow more water to flow through culverts and under bridges reducing the risk of blockages from debris which are often the cause of more damage than was to be expected, as illustrated recently in Auckland and other parts of the country.
- The identification of blue-green networks to provide open spaces for water to flow through the landscape reducing the risks to people and property, which also allow people to connect with nature would appear to be positive additions to the flood management network. That said, Council will need to undertake some very difficult conversations with property owners regarding the removal of high-risk properties and the purchase of the land required for the initiative in some if not all of the areas identified in the Consultation Document.
- Overland flow path management is already in place to some degree, however it would appear that Council needs to educate some relevant communities and property owners regarding the existence of these natural flow paths and the importance of keeping these pathways free from obstructions.
- As noted in the blue-green comment, Council will need to have some difficult conversations with individual property owners and the wider community in areas badly affected by the recent weather events and that remain high risk to future weather events. Council must ensure that all opportunities to mitigate future risks are explored before asking people to re-locate. There must also be surety for anyone requiring to re-locate that they will be paid adequate compensation for their loss in a timely manner, so that they may return to an acceptable standard of living in as short a time as possible.

## **BNH responses to Council's specific feedback questions:**

**(1) How were you and your local community affected by the extreme weather events in early 2023?**

The BNH BID area which largely covers Rosedale and Albany wasn't badly affected by the extreme weather events and although damage wasn't widespread some member businesses suffered significant damage.

**(2) Was your home flooded or damaged during the extreme weather events in early 2023?**

N/A as per comments above.

**(3) In the months following the storms, what has helped you and your community to get through?**

The provision of the relevant information to our members regarding the support available to them through central and local government either financial or otherwise helped those affected businesses to recover from the flooding.

**(4) What would help you and your community feel like you had 'recovered' from these extreme weather events?**

For the businesses involved and the wider community, a return to pre-flooding operations and income are the easiest measures of their recovery. However, their complete recovery requires the identification and implementation of measures to mitigate the risk of further flooding in the future to help allay their fears of what is going to happen every time it rains.

**(5) How can Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland be more prepared for events like this in the future?**

- By identifying and prioritising the implementation of the mitigation strategies outlined in the Consultation Document.
- By ensuring that Council implements the learnings and appropriate improvements required which have been highlighted following their poor response in early 2023. This should enable the right people to understand their roles in any future events and act quickly, appropriately and effectively in support of communities across the region.
- Auckland's emergency response 'master plan' should be supplemented by similar localised plans in each local board area.

**(6) There are nine possible initiatives outlined in Making Space For Water. Our initial budget suggests it will cost \$1.65 billion to deliver them all and will require additional rates from Aucklanders. Do you have any comments on the initiatives?**

Comments on the initiatives are noted above to which BNH would add that the funding of these improvements should not be the sole responsibility of Auckland rate payers. Central government and the various government agencies involved should also be making a contribution to the cost of the projects. This would mean that the additional rates required from Aucklanders which could be as high as 8%, could be set at a lower, more affordable level. BNH also believes that the suggestion that any targeted rate should be tiered so that people pay more in areas where significant investment is required should be fully investigated and consulted upon before any final decision is made.

We would also ask that Council and its delivery partners prioritise the initiatives in the Making Space For Water proposal which will have the greatest effect across the region, in the shortest possible time. Council have noted a 6-year timeframe for the project during which time there are likely to be more extreme weather events which as a region, both collectively and individually, we must be better prepared to cope with.

**(7) Are there any other activities that you think are important to manage flooding that haven't been included in Making Space For Water?**

BNH has to trust that the work already undertaken to develop the Making Room For Water proposal and the initiatives therein cover off the effective management of future flooding risks. We also believe that the ongoing measurement of the success of each initiative should be undertaken and any necessary changes made as they are identified, to ensure the most effective flooding management network is being implemented in the most cost-effective way.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, BNH supports the development of the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Plan and the Making Space For Water initiatives. We also understand the difficulties associated with finding the money to fund such a large programme and as noted previously, we encourage Council to seek funding from a wide array of key stakeholders to help meet the overall programme costs.

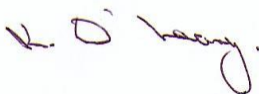
We believe that given the scale of the project, Council should be able to identify some 'easy wins' such as the improved cleaning and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure, which would help to mitigate some of the risks across the whole region, offering better bang for your buck. The larger, more difficult fixes will need to be prioritised and some difficult decisions will need to be taken regarding the relocation of homes at severe risk of future flooding.

Whatever Council decides to do, it must ensure that the harsh lessons learnt from its lack of capability to effectively respond to the emergencies in early 2023, enable the response to future events to be far more coordinated and effective, partly due to the fact that a number of the identified risks across the region have been mitigated by the implementation of various aspects of the Recovery Plan and the Making Space For Water initiatives. It is imperative that the same mistakes from early in 2023 are never allowed to happen again whatever the future weather events.

Finally, BNH would respectfully point to the various caveats to our support and requests/suggestions contained in this submission which we would ask Council to take note of and give due consideration to as decisions are made in formulating both the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Plan and the Making Space For Water initiatives.

Should there be any questions or other matters arising from this submission, we would be pleased to respond to these.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin O'Leary  
General Manager